

Yellow Fever in New York City

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YELLOW FEVER first appeared in New York in 1668. The disease, which Noah Webster described as "Autumnal bilious fever in its infectious form," was so fatal that the newly arrived Governor Dongan ordered a fast day.¹ The Reverend Samuel Megapolensis, writing to a friend in September noted that:

The Lord begins to deal in judgment with his people. He has visited us with dysentery, which is even now increasing in virulence. Many have died of it, and many are lying sick. It appears as if God were punishing this land for its sins.

The Domine recalled with foreboding that a terrible comet had appeared in the west the year before, "a little above the horizon, with the tail upward and hanging over this place."²

The second epidemic of yellow fever occurred in 1702. It was said to have been imported from St. Thomas and was known as "the great sickness." On September 17, the Governor and Council convoked the Assembly to meet at Jamaica, Long Island, on account of the sickness in New York. The Supreme Court was adjourned to the same place. A proclamation was issued regarding the quick burial of victims dying from the "malignant distemper." A weekly day of fast and humiliation was appointed.³ On September 27, 1702, Cornbury reported to the lords of trade:

in ten weeks time, sickness has swept away upwards of five hundred people of all ages and sexes. Some men of note and amongst the rest Capt. Stapleton dyed two days ago, he was Commander of her Majestys Ship Jersey and brought me into this Province.⁴

The former Mayor, Thomas Noell, was on the point of death, the alderman of the South Ward (Brandt Schuyler) was already dead, and

¹ Webster, Noah, *A brief history of epidemic and pestilential disease*, Hartford, 1799, I, 202.

² *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York*, Albany, 1901, I, 85, 169, 173, 597.

³ *Cal. Coun. Min.*, 174.

⁴ *N.Y. Col. Docs.*, IV, 972.

the rest of the aldermen and assistants were very sick or in the country to avoid the "Pestilential distemper."⁵ On September 30, George Keith, A.M., missionary from the Society for Propagating the Gospel preached at the request of Mr. Vesey "at the Weekly Fast, which was appointed by the government, by reason of the great mortality that was then at New York, where above Five Hundred died in the Space of a few weeks; and that very Week, about Seventy died."⁶

The most serious early epidemic of yellow fever in the United States struck Philadelphia in 1793. Four thousand and forty-four victims perished in four months, or one in ten of the entire population. New York was greatly alarmed. The Governor issued a proclamation prohibiting all vessels from Philadelphia from approaching nearer the city than Bedloe's Island, now the site of Bartholdi's famous Statue of Liberty, where a quarantine station had been established by the Province before the Revolution. He next proclaimed a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer which every one kept.⁷

A citizen's committee was formed to aid the Common Council, which named a special cooperating committee of seven in taking precautionary measures. Five physicians, two employed by the Citizen's Committee and three by the city, joined with the health officer in examining suspected cases of the disease. A loan of five thousand dollars was made at the Bank of New York and sent to aid those in need in Philadelphia. The bank "in consequence of the benevolent use intended to be made of the money" demanded only five per cent interest for the same.⁸

In an attempt to stop all intercourse between the two cities guards were posted to prevent entrance by boat or stagecoach. The health committee issued handbills forbidding communications with Philadelphia. Although a night watch was established to prevent entrance after dark and citizens were cautioned not to receive strangers into their homes and to report them to the mayor, fugitives eluded all vigilance. Attempts to smuggle in goods were hindered and normal trade came to a standstill. The city election was seriously interfered with as many dared not enter the city to vote. With the coming of cold weather the danger of yellow fever disappeared as usual. Only a few cases, with an insignificant number of fatalities, had occurred in New York. People credited the efforts of the authorities to prevent intercourse with Philadelphia, the cleaning of the streets and the abatement of nuisances, for their escape.

⁵ *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of N.Y.*, 1784-1831, N.Y., 1917, II, 203.

⁶ Keith, *Journal of Travels* (1706), 50.

⁷ McMaster, J.B., *A history of the people of the United States*, N.Y., 1885, II, 131, 132.

⁸ *M.C.C.*, I, 34, 45.

In 1794, some twenty or thirty cases of yellow fever occurred in New York City. The state government represented to the city authorities the necessity of providing some place of isolation for yellow fever patients. The Common Council decided that the most suitable place appeared to be the estate of Brockholst Livingston, situated on the bank of the East River, opposite the three mile stone and known as Belle Vue. The city purchased the lease of this property of about four acres for two thousand pounds and converted it into a hospital.⁹

Early in the summer of 1795, yellow fever again broke out in New York. The first victims were two sailors who were removed to Belle Vue from the ship *Antoinette* docked at Whitehall on May 29th. On the 19th of July, the brig *Zepher*, Captain Frederick Bird, arrived at New York from Port-Au-Prince loaded with sugar and coffee. Dr. Malachi Treat, the health officer boarded the vessel and found the crew sickly, that several men had died on passage and that a boy had died the morning of her arrival. On July 22nd, Dr. Treat was taken ill and on the thirtieth died of a fever with symptoms characteristic of the disease. Soon the wildest rumors began to circulate throughout the city. It was claimed that Dr. Treat had incautiously opened the dead body. Now people viewed every vessel arriving from the West Indies with suspicion as the importer of the plague. Disease broke out on the ship *William* which had arrived from Liverpool on the 25th of July and four of the crew died. People said the *William* had caught it from the ship *Zepher*, although it was afterward shown that the ships had not been within half a mile of each other. Nevertheless, the fever appeared among the inhabitants of that part of Water Street close to where the *William* lay at wharf. Next suspicion was centered on a bale of cotton deposited in the store of Lawrence and Mott, at the foot of Dover Street, which had been imported in the brig *Caroline*. It was reported that a man had thrust his arm into a bag of the damaged cotton and when he withdrew it the arm, from the virulence of the contagion, was of a livid color.¹⁰

Rumor reached Philadelphia that the people of New York were "popping off like rotten sheep." Two hundred "carcasses" had been burned on the Battery. Five hundred citizens had been hanged lest they should catch the fever. Some forty more had been guillotined. All the glass in the city had been broken by firing cannon. On August 31st, the Governor of Pennsylvania forbade all communication with New York. This threw the citizens of New York into a rage and bets were offered at the Tontine that one-third more people had died at Philadelphia during July and August than had died in New York during

⁹ M.C.C., II, 100, 101.

¹⁰ Bayley, Richard, *An account of the epidemic fever which prevailed in the City of New York during the summer and fall of 1795.*

the same months. Terror was spreading throughout the city, all who could were deserting it and business was at a standstill.¹¹

As usual an attempt was made to minimize the danger. On August 15th, a group of physicians calling themselves The College of Physicians of New York held a meeting at City Hall devoted to the subject of the state of health in the city and reported "that no contagious fever, in any particular different from what this city has been accustomed to, for some years past, at this season, exists at present."¹² The Committee of Health reported on August 29th, that the disorder was a local malady and the number of sick considerably decreased.¹³

A letter of the same date, received in Philadelphia from a New York correspondent, expressed a different view: "The fever rages chiefly in Water Street; my family and myself are unfortunately in the midst of it. There are buried from our neighborhood eight or ten every night. God only knows what will become of us."¹⁴

The Medical Society on September 14th, after pointing out that the College of Physicians were, "some characters who are out of the pale of the medical society," stated that the collective opinion of the Society was that the fever is not specifically contagious.¹⁵ The New York Hospital refused to admit patients on the grounds that they were contagious. The Common Council reported to Governor Jay that in their opinion a much greater degree of health prevailed in New York than usual at this season of the year.¹⁶ Justice James Kent evidently was of a different opinion for on September 17th, he hastily left with his family for Poughkeepsie.

A vivid account of conditions at Bellevue during the epidemic of 1795 is to be found in the diary of Dr. Alexander Anderson, who entered the hospital in September as house surgeon at a salary of four dollars a day. At the time he was less than twenty-one years of age, yet he performed his work as a man and a physician nobly. Writing in his diary¹⁷ under the date of Sunday, September 23, he said:

As I was at tea, Doctor Smith call'd to offer me the care of the Hospital at Bellevue, in place of P. Anderson, who had returned somewhat unwell. The Salary 20s. a day. I promised to give him a decisive answer in the evening. . . . Call'd at Doctor Smith's and agree'd to accept the proposal.

24th. Behold me in a new Station and my mind in a state of confusion

¹¹ McMaster, J.B., *op. cit.*, II, 244.

¹² Davis, M.L., *A brief account of the epidemical fever*, N.Y., 1795, 21.

¹³ *Commercial Advertiser*, August 29, 1795.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1795.

¹⁵ Davis, M.L., *op. cit.*, 16, 17.

¹⁶ M.C.C., II, 177.

¹⁷ Pasko, W.W., *Old New York*, N.Y., 1890, II, 189, *et seq.* The original manuscript of Alexander Anderson's diary is in the Columbia University Library. There is a transcript in the New York Historical Society Library.

and perplexity. At 10 O'clock I call'd on Doctor Smith, and after sitting near 2 hours stepp'd into the Chair with him and away we posted to Bellevue. After instructing me in my duty and introducing me to the family and patients, he shook me affectionately by the hand and departed. There are 6 patients. The Family consists of Mr. Fisher, the steward, and his wife, Old Daddy, the gardener, an old negro, a black nurse, and 2 white ones. I spent the afternoon in putting up medicines and arranging matters. At 5 O'clock I set off and walk'd to my Father's, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, drank tea, pack'd up some clothes, books, &c., in a trunk which I bought of my Father. My Mother's feelings are not a little agitated on this change in our family. I returned to the Hospital about half past 8, my Brother keeping me company about a mile up the road. Another patient had arrived. Attending to him and writing the daily report to the Committee of Health employ'd me 'till near 10 in the evening.

The next day another patient arrived. He was in shocking condition after ten days of the disease, vomiting blood by the mouthful and dying within two hours. Two young seamen arrived in a cart and Anderson performed blood-letting immediately because of the violence of their fever.

On the 29th, Anderson wrote in his diary: "Everything around me had a cheerful aspect because my patients were better." He was called to see a young girl who appeared to be dying, but he revived her "by the application of a large blister and pouring down medicines." She died, however, during the night. The diary notes the deaths of several patients daily. Anderson was of a deeply religious nature and was very conscientious about each and every patient. On the fifteenth trouble arose among the nurses: "Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Hull came to pretty high words." The young physician was apparently quite discouraged for he wrote, "I am sometimes tempted to resign my station."

With the arrival of cold weather there were no new arrivals and on the twelfth of October, Anderson took leave of Bellevue Hospital. "I made," he wrote, "A pretty sudden transition in my business. Having kindled a fire in my new apartment I began at engraving." He had spent seventy-nine days in charge at Bellevue Hospital and had been employed day and night, witnessing above one hundred deaths and assisting in opening four dead bodies. Although he escaped the infection he suffered from great depression of spirit.

Anderson gave so much satisfaction at Bellevue that on retiring in the autumn he was offered a place as physician to the New York Dispensary at a salary of a thousand dollars. He declined the offer.

Early in October, the Philadelphians sent seven thousand dollars to the mayor of New York for the benefit of the poor.¹⁸ The plague had killed 732 out of a total population of about 50,000.

¹⁸ M.C.C., II, 181.

Dr. Valentine Seaman writing on the outbreak of 1795, noted that "musketoes were never before known, by the oldest inhabitants, to have been so numerous as at this season, especially in the southeastern part of the city; they were particularly troublesome to foreigners, many of whom, had those parts of their bodies that were exposed to them, covered with blisters from their venomous operations."¹⁹

In 1796, the state took precautionary measures against further epidemics. An act provided for the appointment of health commissioners in New York City, with the health officer as ex-officio member, with authority to supervise quarantine regulations, to take charge of a lazaretto on Governors or another island, and to make recommendations to the Common Council as to the cleanliness of the city.²⁰ The city was comparatively free from infectious disease during 1796 and 1797. In the spring of the latter year the hospital at Bellevue was rented as a place of entertainment, the lease stipulating however that the house must be surrendered immediately if needed for a hospital.²¹

In the early summer of 1798, yellow fever again appeared in New York and raged with such violence as to be known as the great epidemic. The usual panic seized the people who at that time were preparing for an anticipated war with France. They soon faced an enemy more terrible than any foreign nation. "Upon the approach of this awful disorder," wrote James Hardie, "the bustle we are making for self-defense was suddenly suspended; the warlike looks, which our citizens had assumed, changed into those of dismay; the fortifications in a great measure neglected; the military associations discontinued."²²

The inhabitants are flying in every direction wrote William Dunlap in his diary. Those doing business in the neighborhood of the East River removed their offices to Broadway which was deemed more healthy; the Custom House in Mill Street and the insurance office in Water Street were established for the time in the Tontine Tavern on Broadway. A carpenter on Warren Street was kept busy day and night making cheap coffins of plain pine boards. He would send two boys out with a light hand wagon on which three or four coffins were carried, to sell them in the streets. Stopping at the street corners the boys would cry, "Coffins! Coffins of all sizes!" Still most people could not afford the four dollars asked for a coffin. Every night the dead cart carried

¹⁹ Seaman, Valentine, *An account of the epidemic yellow fever as it appeared in the city of New York in the year 1795*, 3. This pamphlet was published in *A collection of papers on the subject of bilious fevers*, compiled by Noah Webster and published in 1796. In the same volume Elihu Hubbard Smith noted that "insects were very numerous and noxious."

²⁰ *N.Y. State Laws*, Session 49, Ch. 38, 344.

²¹ *Min. Comm. Coun.*, II, 324, 335, 336.

²² Hardie, J., *Account of the malignant fever lately prevalent in the city of New York*, 1798, 6.

corpses to be thrown into the pits of Potter's Field, which was then located on the site of the present Washington Square.²³

Bellevue was reopened on June 12th, with Dr. Isaac S. Douglass in charge. The health officer, Dr. Richard Bayley, asked Dr. Alexander Anderson to find additional medical assistance. Dr. Anderson himself accepted the position at a salary of three pounds a day. On August 31, he was rowed to Bellevue where he found twenty patients. Four died in the course of the day and fourteen more were admitted.

On the eighth of September, Anderson's brother died of the plague and on the tenth his father was stricken. Anderson turned over his work at Bellevue to Dr. Douglass and hastened to look after his father. On the twelfth, his father died and the next day Anderson was horrified to find his wife ghastly and emaciated, sick with yellow fever. Now within a few days his wife, mother and daughter died. The grief stricken Anderson spent several months as physician to the poor and looking after his sick friends, almost all of whom he lost. Terribly depressed he gave up the practice of medicine forever.

At Bellevue, Dr. Douglass himself contracted the disease which he attributed to having visited friends in New York, in that part of the city where yellow fever was raging. He reported that there were no cases of infection among the sixteen nurses and other attendants at the hospital.

Nevertheless, Bellevue was considered by people at large as the house of death. Convalescent patients were crowded in with the sick and dying. The Common Council, therefore, ordered the erection of two new buildings, each sixty by twenty feet, one of which was two stories in height. These structures were completed in eight days. Because of dread of the disease only the most hardened characters could be induced to enter Bellevue as attendants or nurses, but strenuous efforts were made to obtain nurses of good character and finally the "former improper persons" were dismissed and the hospital "began to be viewed by many of the afflicted as a place where they stood a greater chance of recovery than anywhere else."²⁴

On September 3rd, an attempt was made to allay the growing alarm. The few cases of diseases which had occurred were considered due to effluvia from the sewer or from spoiled provisions which had not been shipped due to the French preying on our commerce with the West Indies. "There was no very unusual mortality for the season." On September 6th, it was noted with approval that the authorities at Albany agreed that the epidemic was due to local causes and engendered among themselves: "no sentiment about importation. The gentlemen

²³ Hardie, *op. cit.*, 13, 14, 17.

²⁴ Hardie, *op. cit.*, 51.

of the medical profession have indeed done themselves an honor on this occasion."²⁵ The Common Council appointed a standing committee on September 10, for the duration of the crisis to aid the health commissioner and authorized to take measures for the relief of the sick and indigent, to direct as many physicians as necessary to attend the indigent sick, and to make the necessary arrangement with respect to the admission of the sick at Bellevue Hospital. On September 24th, the city watchman were doubled, because so many people had fled the city. Sextons were criticized for not digging graves deeper and porters for passing too close to the houses when carrying the dead through the street.²⁶

During the great epidemic, 2,086 people died of the yellow fever in New York City. From September 25 to December 23, donations of food, clothing and medicine poured in from the Hudson Valley, Jersey and Connecticut for the victims of yellow fever. More than five hundred families were supplied with food from these contributions.

The physicians of New York were divided in their opinion as to the cause of the American plague. Dr. Valentine Seaman insisted that the fever was of foreign origin and urged proper quarantine regulations for vessels from the West Indies and southern ports, in addition to the maintenance of cleanliness in the city.²⁷ Noah Webster on the other hand laboriously attempting to prove the source of nearly all epidemics to lie in local domestic circumstances in combination with meteoric influences and the appearance of comets. The opinion of those who advocated the local origin theory prevailed for the very obvious reason that the foreign origin theory interfered with the all important commerce.

As a result of the great epidemic of 1798, a joint committee was formed on November 19th, composed of representatives of the Common Council, the Health Commission, the Chamber of Commerce and the Medical Society "to investigate the Causes, Progress and Probable Means of preventing a return of the fever." The recommendations of the joint committee dealt chiefly with the eradication of local nuisances. Perhaps the most useful point made was that "in suggesting the means of removing the causes of pestilential diseases, we consider a plentiful supply of fresh water as one of the most powerful and earnestly recommend that some plan for its introduction into the City, be carried into execution as soon as possible."²⁸ Agitation for a decent water supply resulted only in the Common Council giving in somewhat reluctantly

²⁵ *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, Sept. 6, 1798.

²⁶ Hardie, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Seaman, Valentine, *An inquiry into the cause of the prevalence of the yellow fever in New York*, Medical Repository, I, 315.

²⁸ *Minutes of the Common Council*, II, 494, 499. *Commercial Advertiser*, supplement, Feb. 12, 1799.

to the persuasions of Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton and other interested citizens for chartering the Manhattan Company. The proposition of the Manhattan Company to supply the city with pure and wholesome water was a subterfuge to enable the group backing it to engage in private banking. The development of an adequate public water supply system for New York was retarded for years.

Early in the summer of 1799, the citizens of New York again became alarmed as to the presence of yellow fever. In a letter signed "Truth" from the *Gazette of the United States*, complaint was made that "there is no set of men among us who make so much uproar about the restraint imposed to prevent the introduction of the fever as the merchants; and yet they are always the first people to sound unfounded terror, and extend unnecessary alarm."²⁹

"Our fellow-citizens may rest easy about the fever at present," asserted the *Commercial Advertiser* on July 11, "scattering cases of pestilential fever often occur in June; and are usually the precursors of an epidemic—but that disease *never did*, and probably never will become alarming till August. If Imported!! before that month, it will die of itself."

The story appeared in the *Commercial Advertiser* about a farmer, having heard of the dreadful progress of the yellow fever in the city, was on his way to market when he observed a number of men digging in the middle of the street. His imagination instantly suggested the cause. Turning his horse's head, he galloped home and with great agitation declared, "that the town folks were dying so fast that they were obliged to bury them in the middle of the street!" He had mistaken for graves the canal being dug under the direction of Mr. Latrobe for his waterworks.³⁰

The commissioners of health utilized the newspapers in an attempt to minimize the gravity of the situation. On August 1, they announced that: "the testimony of the Physicians in general concurs in declaring the state of health of this time to be at least as good as it ordinarily is at this season of the year."

In the meantime the quacks did a flourishing business. The papers were full of advertisements of yellow fever remedies such as, "New York Anti Billious Pills so justly celebrated for removing wind and bile in the stomach," and the "Four Herbs Pills of Dr. Angelis, from Italy."

The notorious Dr. Perkins was a resident of New York at this time. Dr. Elisha Perkins, of Norwich, Connecticut was a graduate from Yale College and appears to have been a reputable practitioner

²⁹ *Commercial Advertiser*, July 9, 1799.

³⁰ *Ibid*, July 13, 1799.

up to 1796 when he took up a form of faith healing by inventing an "appliance cure." His cure consisted of two pieces of metal, one apparently iron and the other brass, about three inches long, blunt at one end and pointed at the other. Dr. Perkins took out a patent on his instruments which he called the *Metallic Tractors*. It was claimed that when the rods were placed in contact and drawn over the skin good results would be obtained in the treatment of any disease. At this time anything which suggested electricity interested the public for Galvani had recently shown that the legs of a frog twitched when touched by two metals brought in contact and Benjamin Franklin had shown that lightning was electricity. Perkinism therefore became popular throughout the country and received the approval of some eminent physicians.

Dr. Perkins began advertising that he could cure the yellow fever on July 30, 1799, when the following statement appeared in the *Commercial Advertiser*:

"Dr. Perkins.
*Inventor of the Metallic Points
called Tractors.*

"Having obtained from various experiments satisfactory evidence that the yellow fever is as much within the controul of means safe, simple and easily obtained as any fever whatever, thinks it his duty therefore in this explicit manner to make it known to the public in general, and to the inhabitants of this city in particular. He wishes to administer in the presence of the best judges that a just decision on the subject may be obtained by others. He flatters himself he shall, although a stranger, meet with that candid and liberal treatment which ever characterize a learned and virtuous people.

It is his intentions to give advice in the various complaints that come under the care of Physicians, and if he finds suitable encouragement, to continue his residence in this city.

His office is at No. 59 John Street, where he will be happy to see his friends."

On September 4, 1799, the following news item appeared: "Dr. Perkins, inventor of the Metallic Points, is (we are informed) in a fair way of recovering from his late indisposition." Two days later his death was announced in this brief paragraph: "We mention with sincere regret, that Dr. Perkins, inventor of the Metallic Tractors fell a victim to the prevailing epidemic this morning, after an illness of 6 or 7 days."

Perkinism flourished for some time after the inventor's death however, for in 1801 his son set up a Perkinian Institute in London.

The epidemics had greatly interfered with the aldermanic elections as most people did not care to risk exposure to the disease by entering the city to vote. Therefore, at the suggestion of the Common Council,

the legislature on March 21, 1800, changed the annual election day for charter officers from September 29 to the third Tuesday in November, and the time for swearing in the officers elect from October 14 to the first Monday in December. This arrangement remained in effect until 1822.

The hospital at Bellevue remained closed from 1798 to 1803. In that year the city was again alarmed by the extent of the yellow fever. The buildings at Bellevue were again used as a pest house.³¹ The next epidemic occurred in 1805 and caused 50,000 people to flee the city. Business was moved to Greenwich. Bellevue was opened once more. An asylum was erected on the public grounds adjoining Bellevue gate, for such poor families as the Board of Health judged it expedient to remove from the seat of the disease. The doors of the Almshouse on Chambers Street were thrown open and rations issued to 1,640 families.³²

John Pintard, the city inspector, reported to the Board of Health that: "The buildings called hospitals erected at Bellevue appear to have been set up on the spur of the occasion, and on the presumption that the fever would never recur again. Fatal experience had proved otherwise, and points to the conviction that we may expect repeated attacks from this insidious disease. The wards, the one appropriated for the men especially, are every way inadequate to the wants of the patients or the comfort of the nurses and physicians. The buildings are on too contracted a scale—of materials too slight to repel the summer heat or autumnal colds. The crowded state of the hospital, during the last season, must have had an unfavorable influence on the spirits of the patients. Those newly arrived were evidently depressed by the shrieks of convulsed and dying subjects."³³

An interesting note by Dr. Edward Miller, the city physician, showed clearly that yellow fever was not contagious. "The nurses, at Bellevue Hospital," he wrote, "became entirely free from all apprehensions of the contagiousness of this disease, so that they often slept on the same bed, with the sick, and it happened more than once, in the course of the season, that a nurse overcome with fatigue and want of sleep, threw herself in the night, for a little repose, on the bed of a dying patient, and continued there asleep, till the patient was dead, and it became necessary to remove the corpse."³⁴

Although the authorities loudly proclaimed that the plague was a local malady, their efforts to clean up the city were quite spasmodic

³¹ M.C.C., III, 371, 372.

³² Hardie, *op. cit.*, 100-107.

³³ Hardie, *op. cit.*, 112-117.

³⁴ Miller, Edward, *Report, etc., Documents relating to the Board of Health*, 56.

while business men strove anxiously to keep the extent of the disease from being made public. Thus, in 1819, when yellow fever again broke out a meeting of citizens at the Tontine Coffee House representing the "whole commercial interest, and that of all moneyed men" denounced the resident physician of the city as incompetent and urged his removal, because he was honest enough to declare as was his sworn duty that yellow fever existed at No. 13 Williams Street. The doctor was even threatened with personal violence. People blamed the Baltimore Packets which generally took their stand in *Old Slip* for the appearance of the plague in that vicinity. The sick were removed to Fort Stevens on Long Island and the poor to Staten Island.³⁵

A popular idea prevailed that alcohol was a prophylactic. "Never, I believe," wrote Dr. G. H. Smith "was drunkenness so common." People drank not only for protection, but because of the depressing fear of death and idleness due to want of employment.

As late as 1822, the belief still lingered that disease was a punishment for sins and a sign of God's displeasure. Mr. Reeder, "a young gentleman of irreproachable morals" was carried to New York Hospital where he died four days later of yellow fever. Another epidemic had arrived. The clergymen of different denominations looked upon it as a "sore judgment" upon a community of transgressors. They addressed a memorial to the city fathers suggesting the necessity of public humiliation and prayer. On the recommendation of the Common Council the mayor fixed upon Friday, the 11th of October as a day of supplication to Almighty God. "The places of worship in the lower parts of town were not as might reasonably be expected open, but those in the upper parts and outskirts of the city were filled by very respectable people." As a matter of fact, the Board of Health had ordered Trinity and Grace churches closed on August 9th. The Customs House was removed to Greenwich and the Post Office, the banks, the insurance offices, the printing establishments were also moved out of danger.³⁶

The epidemic of 1822, was the last important outbreak of the American plague in New York City. Yellow fever appeared almost annually at the quarantine stations, but the city was free from it. In 1856, some 538 cases occurred in various localities near the port of New York. In 1870, the last outbreak occurred when a few cases were treated at Governor's Island.

Since yellow fever in New York was an exotic disease it was successfully combated by quarantine measures long before its true nature was known. In these days of rapid transportation yellow fever is still a threat from which we in America are protected by the barriers of quarantine, vaccination and medical vigilance.

³⁵ Pascalis, Felix, *A statement of the occurrences during a malignant fever.*

³⁶ Stokes, I. N. Phelps, *Iconography of New York*, New York, 1916-28, V.